



NEWS RELEASE

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Corps proposes navigation improvement dredging of Oak Bluffs Harbor in Oak Bluffs on Martha's Vineyard

CONCORD, Mass. – At the request of the Town of Oak Bluffs, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District is proposing to perform navigation improvement dredging of the Oak Bluffs Harbor in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts.

The purpose of the proposed navigation improvement project is to deepen the Oak Bluffs Harbor entrance channel, under the authority of Section 107 of the River and Harbor Act of 1960 (P.L. 86-645). An initial 30-day public notice for this proposed project was issued on May 3, 2004. No comments were received. This notice provides an update on the changes in the project description.

Oak Bluffs Harbor is located on the island of Martha's Vineyard in the town of Oak Bluffs. Dredging of approximately 3,500 cubic yards of sandy material from the Oak Bluffs entrance channel is needed to provide adequate depth for the safe passage of the harbor's fleet. The proposed plan in the May 3, 2004 public notice was to hydraulically dredge the channel to -10 feet MLLW (mean lower low water) and dispose of the 5,800 cubic yards of sandy material on a beach to the south of the inlet.

The current proposed plan is to dredge the channel to -10 feet MLLW with a hydraulic hopper dredge (the Government-owned Currituck) and place 3,500 cubic yards of sandy material at a nearshore disposal site located 1.0 mile east of the channel. The reduced volume of material is due to emergency dredging conducted by the Town in 2006.

Natural shoaling processes have reduced available depths within the entrance channel to as little as -6.5 feet MLLW in a portion of the channel. Shoaling in the channel is making navigation in this harbor hazardous and difficult for passenger ferries, fishing boats and other craft. The proposed work would remove the areas that have shoaled and deepen the existing channel to provide safe access to the Harbor at all tide stages. About one acre of the channel bottom would be dredged.

A hydraulic hopper dredge will be used to remove the sandy sediments. The dredge will remove material from the channel bottom and transport it to a nearshore area for disposal. The work will be performed during an approximate one-to-three day period during the late spring to early summer when the dredge is available. The dredging window for the project is May through January.

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Corps proposes Oak Bluffs Harbor dredging/2-2-2-2-2

Several project alternatives were considered for this project. The action alternatives involved dredging the Oak Bluffs entrance channel to depths of -9, -10, -11, and -12 feet. Alternative dredging methods such as hydraulic, hopper and mechanical dredges were considered. The Government-owned hopper dredge Currituck will be performing the work. Alternative disposal sites such as ocean, upland, nearshore and beach disposal sites were also considered. The use of a nearshore disposal area is needed to complete the work with the Currituck.

The sandy material from Oak Bluffs channel will be placed at a sandy nearshore area located approximately one mile east of the channel. The sediments at the disposal area are similar in grain size (i.e. medium to fine grained sands) to those in the Oak Bluffs entrance channel. This site was chosen as the disposal area to keep the sand in the littoral system yet avoid direct impacts to marine resources (specifically, eelgrass). The disposal area is approximately one acre. An Environmental Assessment for this work has been prepared and is available for review upon request.

There is no existing federal navigation project for Oak Bluffs Harbor. The entire channel was last dredged by the Town of Oak Bluffs in 1971-72. Emergency dredging operations to remove dangerous shoaling were performed in 2006.

The proposed project has been coordinated with the following Federal, state and local agencies: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Coast Guard, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, the Massachusetts Office of Coastal Zone Management, the Massachusetts Office of Environmental Protection, the Massachusetts Office of Conservation and Recreation, the Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the Massachusetts Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources, the Oak Bluffs Harbor Management Committee, the Town of Oak Bluffs Board of Selectmen, the Town of Oak Bluffs Harbormaster, and the Oak Bluffs Shellfish Department.

The public notice for this proposed work, with more detailed information, is available for review on the Corps website at <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil>. Select "navigation" and then "public notices" or go directly to the link at: <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/navigation/pubnot2.asp>.

Public comments on this proposed work should be forwarded no later than March 20, 2010 to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New England District, Engineering/Planning Division (ATTN: Mr. Mark Habel), 696 Virginia Road, Concord, MA 01742-2751.

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